Using A Differential Reinforcement Program In A High School Self-contained Classroom of Students With Autism To Increase Student On-task Behavior.

Barry Erstein

Florida International University
Statement of the Problem

As educators, we must take on many roles when teaching. In addition to teaching academics we are faced with the challenge of managing several problem and off-task behaviors. There are several additional barriers that make the instruction and behavior management of students with autism more of a challenge than teaching students in general education classes. Some students with autism may lack the necessary communication and social skills needed to fully understand and demonstrate appropriate classroom behavioral expectations. Differential reinforcement programs have shown some success when working with students who have been diagnosed with autism. Problem and off task behaviors can limit the academic achievement of the student displaying the behavior and of other students within the classroom. According to Chitiyo, Makweche-Chitiyo, Park, Ametepee and Chitiyo (2011), students with problem behaviors can compromise the school’s ability to educate children. Finding a way to limit problem and off task behaviors can increase instructional time and in turn improve the child’s education.

Purpose

The purpose of this study is to describe the effects of a Differential Reinforcement program on students with autism and their on-task behaviors.

Literature Review

Beare, Severson, and Brandt (2004) conducted research on using positive reinforcement to increase the amount of time a participant spends on task and decrease any disrupting, off-task
behaviors. This study utilized a combination of both DRO and DRA. The researchers used time sampling to record when the participant was exhibiting on-task behaviors.

A more time efficient way to address behaviors is by using a classroom behavior plan instead of individual behavior plans. Daddario, Anhalt, and Varton (2007) conducted a study exploring the effectiveness of DRO in a classroom setting to decrease the disruptive behavior of seven preschool children who were said to be advancing with typical development.

LeGray, Dufrene, Mercer, Olmi, and Sterling (2013) conducted a study investigating the effectiveness of a DRA program to increase appropriate behaviors and decrease disruptive and inappropriate behaviors. Pre-teaching consisted of the teacher individually taking each student to a calm and quiet spot in the classroom to review the pre-teaching protocol. The pre-teaching protocol consisted of behavioral expectations for the student relating to the targeted incorrect behaviors.

Athens and Vollmer (2010) conducted research on DRA without extinction. In this study the authors were able to change the time durations to promote reinforcement that promoted appropriate behaviors. The authors stated that the most noteworthy behavior changes happened when different forms of positive reinforcement such as praise and physical contact such as a “thumbs up” were combined to reinforce appropriate behavior. Un-favored behaviors were reinforced with reprimands such as, “stop doing that”.

**Method**

The research will take place in a lower socioeconomic High School self-contained autism unit. The three students selected for this research are part of a larger class of eight students with Autism. Of these students, seven are male and one is female.

The students were observed for 20 minutes. Every one minute I noted if the students were on-task or off-task by writing an “X” for off-task and an “O” for on task. After the video, the students were asked a multiple choice question. In addition, they were also asked to illustrate one event from the video. Each student was individually presented the behavior expectations and was asked five comprehension questions until they were answered with 100% accuracy.

I will use a Standard Celeration Chart to graph the occurrence of both on-task and off-task behaviors. Student work samples will be used to analyze comprehension. The percentage correct will be calculated for the preaching protocol.

A 3 ring binder with the data collection forms, work samples and data protocol answer sheets will be collected and placed in each student’s individual section in chronological order.

**Findings**

Once the action research is complete, I hope to find that verbal and physical praise in conjunction with redirection will increase on-task behaviors and decrease off-task behaviors.

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<th>Timeline</th>
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<td>Inform principal</td>
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Differential Reinforcement To Increase On-task Behavior

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<tr>
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<th>January 9, 10, 13, &amp; 14</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Baseline</td>
<td>January 15</td>
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<tr>
<td>Pre-teaching protocol</td>
<td>January 16, 23, 30</td>
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<td>February 6, 13, 20, 27</td>
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**Implications**

Teachers faced with the challenge of education students while managing behavioral problems in a classroom of students with Autism may find this research useful. In addition to Educators looking for an effective, low cost strategy to increase on-task behaviors and decrease off-task behaviors.
References


